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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 000639

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SUBJECT: ITALIAN SUPPORT FOR SOMALI PEACE INITIATIVES

REF: ROME 331

CLASSIFIED BY: POL M C THOMAS COUNTRYMAN FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: BECAUSE OF ITALY'S HISTORIC TIES WITH SOMALIA AND ETHIOPIA, THE GOI IS PLAYING A STRONG ROLE IN THE SOMALI PEACE PROCESS. IT APPEARS TO SEE ITS ROLE AS BOTH ENCOURAGING ALLIED STATES TO SUPPORT THE MOI-LED RECONCILIATION EFFORT AND RECONCILING SOMALI-ETHIOPIAN  
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TENSIONS. THE MFA HAS INDICATED ITS CONCERN (REF A) THAT ETHIOPIA COULD SPONSOR AGGRESSION AND FALSELY CLAIM TO BE ACTING AT U.S. BEHEST. REPORTS OF A GOI-SPONSORED PEACE CONFERENCE ON FEB. 15 ARE SPURIOUS. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

2. (C) AT A MEETING FEB. 5 WITH MINISTER BRUNO CABRAS, DIRECTOR GENERAL FOR SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN AFFAIRS AT THE MFA, POST INQUIRED ABOUT A REPORT IN THE ITALIAN MEDIA OF A FEB. 8 SOMALI OPPOSITION MEETING IN ROME, TO BE FOLLOWED BY A PEACE CONFERENCE AMONG FACTION REPRESENTATIVES HERE FEB. 15. CABRAS STATED THAT ANY SUCH MEETINGS WERE PRIVATE INITIATIVES OF WHICH HE WAS NOT AWARE. HE SUGGESTED THAT THE PRESS HAD INCORRECTLY DESCRIBED AN EVENT ACTUALLY PLANNED FOR FEB. 15: AN MFA ROUNDTABLE ON SOMALIA FOR EUROPEAN EXPERTS AND ACADEMICS, NOT SOMALI OPPOSITION FIGURES.

3. (C) CABRAS INFORMED EMBOFFS THAT THE GOI WAS PLANNING A SOMALIA PEACE INITIATIVE, BUT THAT IT WOULD BE COMPLEMENTARY TO THE PLANNED NAIROBI PEACE CONFERENCE AND COORDINATED WITH RELEVANT PLAYERS, INCLUDING THE USG. THE GOI WOULD NOT DO ANYTHING TO HARM THE NAIROBI PROCESS.

4. (C) ASKED ABOUT A RECENT ROUNDTABLE ON SOMALIA IN WHICH TWO FORMER GOI OFFICIALS CALLED FOR A SOMALI PEACE CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN ROME INSTEAD OF NAIROBI, CABRAS STATED THAT THESE INDIVIDUALS SIDED WITH A PRO-ETHIOPIAN FACTION. THIS GROUP PREFERRED A MEETING THAT WOULD DISCUSS ONLY TERRORISM, THEREBY DISCREDITING SOMALIA'S TRANSITIONAL NATIONAL GOVERNMENT. CABRAS SAID HE HAD SHARED THE MFA'S VIEW--THAT THIS WAS A MISUSE OF THE TERRORISM ISSUE--WITH DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS RECENTLY.

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5. (U) A FEB. 7 MFA PRESS RELEASE REPORTED THAT MFA UNDER SECRETARY ALFREDO MANTICA HAD MET THAT DAY WITH A SOMALI

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DELEGATION HEADED BY OSMAN JAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE MIXED COMMISSION (ADMINISTRATION-PARLIAMENT) FOR NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. THE PURPOSE OF THE ENCOUNTER WAS TO DISCUSS THE SOMALI PEACE PROCESS AND ITALY'S ROLE IN IT. "THIS MEETING INITIATES AN INTENSE SERIES OF MEETINGS THROUGH WHICH THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT WILL MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH THE VARIOUS SOMALI PARTIES INTERESTED IN CONTRIBUTING TO THE PEACE PROCESS," MANTICA SAID. "ITALY'S INITIATIVE, ALTHOUGH INDEPENDENT, COMPLEMENTS THE IGAD PROCESS ... IN ORDER TO SUPPORT IT AND ENSURE ITS SUCCESS.... ITALY IS READY TO PROVIDE THE POLITICAL SUPPORT NECESSARY TO ENSURE THE REALIZATION OF INTRA-SOMALI DIALOGUE." ECHOING POINTS MADE IN PREVIOUS POST DISCUSSIONS WITH MFA, THE PRESS RELEASE ALSO NOTED, "WE CONSIDER INDISPENSABLE THE WIDEST POSSIBLE PARTICIPATION OF ALL SOMALI FACTIONS AT THE UPCOMING CONFERENCE IN NAIROBI, AND WE HOPE THAT THE TRANSITIONAL NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND ALL RELEVANT PARTIES COLLABORATE CLOSELY WITH KENYAN PRESIDENT MOI IN HIS COORDINATION EFFORTS ..."

6. (U) A FEB. 5 ARTICLE IN THE ITALIAN DAILY LA STAMPA STATED THAT MANTICA HAD JUST RETURNED FROM A VISIT TO THE HORN OF AFRICA, WHERE HE MET MOI AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE EIGHT WARRING SOMALI FACTIONS. MANTICA IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT SOMALIA SHOULD SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITY THE PEACE CONFERENCE PRESENTS BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE, BECAUSE IT RISKS BECOMING ANOTHER AFGHANISTAN. MANTICA EMPHASIZED THE GOI'S READINESS TO WORK WITH ETHIOPIA, WITH WHOM IT SHARES HISTORIC  
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TIES, TO SMOOTH OVER ANY IRRITANTS IN ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH SOMALIA. ITALY WOULD MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO INVOLVE THE EU IN ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL COMMITMENTS TOWARD PEACE.  
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